

A maverick determined to succeed

BUSINESS LUNCH

Robin Johnson talks to Kavita Oberoi, who runs Pride Park IT training firm Oberoi Consulting.



FROM the moment she was born, Kavita Oberoi's life was pretty much mapped out for her.

Born into an Indian family, it was important for her to uphold tradition and honour.

But Kavita is something of a self-confessed maverick. Simply spending the rest of her life staying at home and looking after her family would never have been enough to satisfy her adventurous spirit.

She yearned to go to university, then get a high-flying job. But it was unheard of for a female in her family to that.

After her father died, Kavita came to an agreement with her mother. She could go to university – a 90-minute commute every day – as long as she fulfilled her other obligations, one of which included having an arranged marriage.

She fulfilled her part of the bargain – and to great effect.

Today, as boss of Pride Park IT training firm Oberoi Consulting, Kavita is one of the most successful businesswomen in the country.

Her achievements led to an invitation to appear on Channel Four's *The Secret Millionaire* television programme, which takes entrepreneurs away from their comfortable lives and into areas with high



ADVENTUROUS: Kavita Oberoi with Robin Johnson at Darley's restaurant, in Darley Abbey.

Picture: Hannah Brackenbury HB150409D-4

levels of crime, teenage pregnancy and unemployment. They eventually reveal their identities to deserving groups and decide whether or not to hand over some of their cash.

Kavita said her appearance on the programme was life-changing – and it continues to have an influence on almost everything she does.

But before she appeared on the programme, Kavita had turned down a previous invitation.

"I was approached to appear in the first series two years ago, but I turned it down," said Kavita, who joined me for lunch at Darley's.

"Because it was a new programme I didn't know what I would be letting myself in for.

"But in January last year, I went to Mumbai on a trip

which included some visits to local charities. I came across a woman who went to India 35 years ago with her daughter who had cystic fibrosis.

"She stayed in India to overturn a rule that said that disabled children in India had no

"If you work hard enough, you create your own luck."

KAVITA OBEROI

right to an education.

"She set up the National Spastics Society in India and now everyone, whether able or not, has the right to education. Her own daughter went on to get a double MA at Oxford.

"Her story really inspired me. So when the call came

again from *Secret Millionaire*, I felt ready to do it.

"In my father's latter years he turned to philanthropy, following his business success. He started giving his money away to help others. To this day it is his philanthropy not his business success that is remembered."

For the programme, Kavita went undercover for 10 days as a volunteer in the Ladywood area of Birmingham, which has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy, gun crime and unemployment in Britain.

She worked with a number of organisations, including the Karis Neighbour Scheme and Ladywood Furniture Project. She was very impressed by another scheme called Martha's Oasis, which was running a programme called "Sisters

CV: KAVITA OBEROI

KAVITA Oberoi was born and grew up in Bradford.

She got her first job working in a clothes shop there but wanted to study. She eventually persuaded her family to let her go to Huddersfield University to do a degree in applied chemistry.

During the course, she spent a year working in a research laboratory at ICI.

After leaving university with a first-class honours degree, Kavita got a job as a sales rep for Bayer Pharmaceuticals.

Shortly afterwards she moved from Bradford to live with her husband, Deven and father-in-law in Derby.

In 2001, she set up her own company, Oberoi Consulting, running the business from the family home until 2004 when it moved to purpose-built premises on Pride Park.

Today, the company employs 22 people.

Kavita lives in Hazelwood with her father-in-law, husband and their two daughters.

and had the chief executive of Cadburys on one side and the chief executive of Aviva on the other. A bit of me thought, how did I end up here?

"I think the most nerve-racking job was reviewing front pages of national newspapers live on Sky News."

Kavita is currently gearing up for her next television appearance – as a guest on *The Apprentice You're Fired!* – on BBC2 on May 6 at 10pm.

As well as all that – Kavita has a business to run.

Oberoi Consulting provides clinical audit, IT training/solutions and business consulting to more than one in five GP practices across the country, commissioned by primary care trusts and pharmaceutical companies.

She said: "In terms of how well the business is doing, I cannot complain. But I do appreciate that it is tough for a lot of people and recently I've offered Oberoi's conference facilities and meeting rooms for free for businesses starting up.

"I think the key to getting through the downturn is to get yourself out there.

"It's also worth analysing the product that you offer and then looking at ways that it can be adapted for other sectors.

"We offer IT training and business consulting to the healthcare sector, but really there is nothing stopping us from offering our services to other sectors and that's what we intend to do."

This entrepreneurial spirit runs through the Oberoi family. Her father-in-law, Dayal, has run lighting shop Oberoi Brothers, in Mackworth, for a number of years, with Kavita's husband, Deven.

The shop is in the process of winding down as Dayal wants to retire. This will result in Deven joining his wife to work at Oberoi Consulting.

Kavita said: "When I look back over what I have achieved so far, I think it has been down to a lot of hard work and a bit of good fortune. But I've found if you work hard enough, you create your own luck."